

The Artist's Point of View

Lynd Ward "Writes" a New Book in Pictures



*The continuity (in words):
The Girl returns to her violin after
the Father has attempted suicide*

IHAVE JUST had an extraordinary experience. I have *seen* a book. I look at the clock. It is only one hour since I sat down here at my desk and began seeing life through the eyes and burin of Lynd Ward. In that hour I have experienced the life of the Girl, the Boy, the Father, the Elderly Gentleman, and modern American civilization as keenly as ever any Dickens, Thackeray, or Shakespeare could make me see life through the magic of the word. Ward has shifted symbols — from those with meaning for the intellect to those with meaning for the eye. He writes a book in pictures. The only words in his vast human drama are a few titles: *February, March, Monday, Tuesday, 1927, 1930*, etc. And the title of the whole is *Vertigo**, whatever that means to you.

I have *seen* life. The feeling of identification

* *Vertigo* by Lynd Ward. (Random House, \$3.00.)

is extraordinary. I have seen the Girl graduate from high school; seen her conflict, between the pull to her violin and to the Boy, with all its consequences; seen the Father lose his job and his hopes; seen the Boy's ideals shattered one by one and come tumbling down on his eager young head; seen the Elderly Gentleman and known his thoughts as only his valet might see him and, if he were a Ward or a Dickens, know them. And I have seen the irony of the final blood transfusion and the moment of bliss it purchased in the escape to the wild dash of the roller coaster. I have shared in all these living events.

The shift of symbols has many challenging implications. First, the fact that these are artist-created symbols, purified of all irrelevant matter and thoroughly integrated into a functional work of art, is important.

Then, the consecutive impact of a developed theme is a new dimension in the handmade picture. Other artists of the wood block from Dürer and Holbein to Doré and the contemporary school have told stories in single pictures and in a consecutive series of illustrations like Holbein's *Dance of Death*. But Masareel in Paris and Ward in America are the first to present an entire novel in pictures. The cumulative effect of this developed theme is uncanny when every element of the picture is under the control of an artist.

Eye-mindedness with the great mass of people is natural. The visual image is more readily assimilated than the thought image. But that natural inclination has, in recent times, been directed more to factual than to sensory observation. Lynd Ward is telling a story in works of art. He is unshackling the picture from its past limitation to the single scene or event and opening up a brave new world as broad as the novel, poem, or play and, in its purely visual aspects, as the picture on the stage.

Finally, he is doing all this with insight, freshness, and great plastic power.

RALPH M. PEARSON